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THE HEBREW TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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The special phase of the theme committed to the writer is that pertaining to the Hebrew text of the Authorized Version, and to improvements of the Hebrew text since 1611.

What Hebrew text or texts formed the basis of the work of the revisers who produced the Old Testament of the King James Version? On the face of it, it could not have been the "Textus Receptus," for that is the edition of Van der Hooght, which appeared at Amsterdam in 1705. Neither could it have been any single one of the many Hebrew texts of that time, as attested by the thousands of marginal notes of the 1611 edition. Scrivener¹ reports these marginal notes to the number of 6,637, of which 4,111 express the more literal meaning of the original Hebrew or Aramaic (there are 77 referring to the latter language); 2,156 give alternative renderings, "which in the opinion of the translator are not very less probable than those in the text; in 63 the meaning of proper names is stated for the benefit of the unlearned"; in 240 necessary information is given by way of harmonizing the text with other passages of Scripture, especially in regard to the orthography of Hebrew names; while the remaining 67 refer to various readings of the original, in 31 of which the marginal variation (called *Q^cré*) of the Massoretic revisers of the Hebrew is set in competition with the reading in the text (*K^cthibh*).

The preface to the Authorized Version has little to say on the subject. The quaint document reads:

If you aske what they had before them, truely it was the Hebrew text of the Olde Testament, the Greeke of the New. These are the two golden pipes, or rather conduits, where-through the olive branches emptie themselves into the golde. Saint Augustine calleth them precedent, or originall tongues; Saint Hierome, fountaines. The same Saint Hierome affirmeth, and Gratian

¹ *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible 1611*, p. 41.

hath not spared to put it into his Decree, That as the credit of the olde Bookes (he meaneth of the Old Testament) is to bee tryed by the Hebrewes Volumes, so of the New by the Greeke tongue, he meaneth by the originall Greeke. If trueth be to be tried by these tongues, then whence should a Translation be made, but out of them? These tongues therefore, the Scriptures wee say in those tongues, wee set before us to translate, being the tongues wherein God was pleased to speake to his church by his Prophets and Apostles.

These statements give us no clew to the Hebrew text or texts which the revisers used. The term "Hebrewes Volumes" may allow us to infer that they had at hand several volumes, either those of different editions, or of one of the several-volume editions.

Ginsburg² describes twenty-four editions of parts, or of the whole of the Hebrew Bible, which appeared between 1475 and 1530. These were prepared from manuscripts preserved in private or public collections in Italy, Portugal, or Spain. The earlier editions consisted either of portions of the Bible from a manuscript or two, or of the whole Old Testament printed from only a few manuscripts. The most complete text of these early editions is that of the *Second Edition of the Rabbinic Bible, or the editio princeps of Jacob ben Chayim with the Massorah* (Venice, 1524-25). Jacob ben Chayim was an untiring worker, whose energy and enthusiasm aroused Bomberg and induced him to father a noble enterprise. This is quaintly told in Jacob ben Chayim's own words in the Introduction to his work, as follows:

When I explained to Bomberg the advantage of the Massorah, he did all in his power to send into all the countries in order to search out what may be found of the Massorah, and praised be the Lord we obtained as many of the Massoretic books as could possibly be got. He was not backward, and his hand was not closed, nor did he draw back his right hand from producing gold out of his purse to defray the expenses of the books and of the messengers who were engaged to make search for them in the most remote corners and in every place where they might possibly be found.³

This Introduction of Jacob ben Chayim shows how diligently he sent out after every known bit of material that would aid him in preparing an edition of the Hebrew Bible that would be relatively complete in its presentation of the Massorah. After several

² *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 779-976.

³ C. D. Ginsburg, *Jacob b. Chayim's Introduction to the Rabbinic Bible*, pp. 8, 77.

years of prodigious labor which showed wide learning and broad Hebrew scholarship he was enabled through the munificence of Daniel Bomberg to complete the work. It was published in four folio volumes by Bomberg in Venice, 1524-25. This great work has been the basis of almost all our later Massoretic texts of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jacob ben Chayim's description of his work in preparing this wonderful edition is evidence that he made use of all previous editions of the Hebrew Bible, and of such manuscripts as were available in the different countries visited by his messengers. In all probability he also had at his disposal the Hebrew text of the Complutensian Polyglot which had been officially published at Alcalá, Spain, in 1520. This text, however, would have added little to his equipment because it represented few manuscripts, and it would have had no Massoretic critical value because of its numerous errors.

Valuable additions to the available number of Hebrew Bibles which appeared during the next eighty years were the Third Rabbinic Bible, 1547-48; the Fourth Rabbinic Bible, 1568; and the so-called Antwerp Polyglot of 1569-72, issued under the patronage of Philip II, hence sometimes called *Biblia Regia*, edited by Aries Montanus.

There was thus an abundance of editions of the Hebrew Bible at hand for the translators of the Authorized Version. But all those that appeared subsequently to the Second Bomberg edition (1524-25) are based on that text, or are of value in so far as they conform to the collations of the Massorah printed in that work.

Scrivener⁴ says:

Respecting the Hebrew text which they [the revisers] followed, it would be hard to identify any particular edition, inasmuch as the differences between early printed Bibles are but few. The Complutensian Polyglot, however, which afforded them such important help in the Apocrypha, was of course at hand, and we seem to trace its influence in some places. . . . Yet the Complutensian throws no light on the readings in many other passages, where some other text must have been before the translators.

The abundance of marginal notes, already mentioned, testifies to the presence in the hands of those translators, of several editions

⁴ *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible 1611*, pp. 42 f.

of Hebrew texts, as well as those of the other prominent versions in other languages. But no scholar up to the present time has been able specifically to put his hand on any edition of the text of the Hebrew Bible and say: "This was the text from which the translators of the King James Version translated the Old Testament."

The second part of the theme to be treated by the writer is the revisions of the Hebrew Text since 1611. The revisers of the King James Version made use of a considerable number of Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. The numerous marginal notes confirm the supposition. After the appearance of the Authorized Version, scholars continued to publish editions of the Hebrew Bible. The long succession of these is indicated in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.⁵

Immediately following the appearance of the Authorized Version Bible students were greeted with the publication at Paris of a Polyglot Bible in ten folio volumes (1629-45), later called the Paris Polyglot. This was followed shortly (1657) by the London Polyglot, edited by Bishop Walton in six folio volumes. The Hebrew text of these massive works was in the same lineage with and was practically no improvement upon that already issued in the Bomberg Bible of 1524-25.

The first subsequent edition of the Hebrew text which commanded the attention and confidence of scholars was that of Van der Hooght, which was published at Amsterdam in 1705, though it was practically a reprint of the Athias-Leusden edition (Amsterdam, 1667). This was so favorably regarded that it was soon recognized as a kind of *textus receptus* of the Old Testament, and has been used as the basis of the editions of Houbigant (Paris, 1753), Kennicott (Oxon., 1776), Hahn (1832), Letteris (Vienna, 1852). This last was reprinted in large clear type by the British and Foreign Bible Society (Berlin, 1866), and by Wiley & Sons of New York (1872-75). The first Hebrew Bible printed in America was published by William Fry of Philadelphia in 1814, from the Hebrew text of Van der Hooght, the Hebrew *textus receptus*.

During nearly all the first three hundred years of the printed

⁵ Vol. III, p. 161.

Hebrew Bible there had been only one serious successful attempt to gather into one work the variants of all known Hebrew manuscripts. That was attempted and completed by Jacob ben Chayim in 1524-25. Every other editor and publisher had been satisfied with the use either of a few manuscripts, or of a few manuscripts and a printed text. The latter half of the eighteenth century saw a new awakening in this line of investigation. Benjamin Kennicott, an Englishman, at the suggestion of Professor Lowth, began to collect the variants in the available Hebrew manuscripts. Beginning in 1760, with the aid of a number of scholars, and at an expense of about \$50,000, he succeeded in collecting and having collected the variant readings of 694 manuscripts, and almost numberless editions. These variants pertain to the consonants only. The results of his and others' arduous labors were published at Oxford in 1776-80, in two folio volumes.

Inspired by the example of Kennicott, De Rossi, a professor in the University of Parma, Italy, visited libraries and collections of Hebrew manuscripts for the purpose of discovering variant readings. He found and collected the variants of 732 manuscripts and 310 editions. Of all these Kennicott had seen only eighty. In 1784-88, De Rossi published four volumes quarto, and in 1798 a supplemental volume embodying the results of his investigations. Kennicott and De Rossi together compared 1,346 different Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament, and 342 reported editions, or 1,686 different manuscripts.

One of the most important results of these investigations is the fact that the basal Hebrew text underlying all the 1,686 manuscripts examined by these two scholars and their helpers was practically one and the same. Nevertheless these variants thus collected put at the disposal of all Hebrew scholars a mass of material valuable for critical processes.

Not until the last half of the nineteenth century did scholars make another serious attempt to improve the Hebrew *apparatus criticus*.

In 1869, Seligman Baer, with the collaboration of Professor Franz Delitzsch of the University of Leipzig, began to edit anew the books of the Old Testament in Hebrew, following the Mas-

soretic tradition. This work continued to appear in parts until 1895; and covered nearly the entire Old Testament. It was based on no special antecedent text, but claimed to have gathered the best of the available Massorah.

Ginsburg⁶ very sharply criticizes the Baer-Delitzsch text on several counts. Some of these were due, as indicated in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (Vol. I, p. 434), "to Baer's inability to consult manuscripts in the large European collections." In spite of some rather arbitrary innovations in the Hebrew text, Baer did a valuable service in emphasizing the real value of the Massorah in the interpretation of the Old Testament.

From 1863 down to the present time, Christian D. Ginsburg of London has been a most ardent student of the Massorah. He collected all the available extant remains of that material and published three volumes in 1880-86. On the basis of these collections he edited a new text of the Old Testament in 1894 under the title, *The Massoretico-Critical Text of the Hebrew Bible*. To this he wrote an almost exhaustive Introduction, a volume of first importance in the study of the Massoretic Hebrew Bible (1897). The climax of Ginsburg's life-work is promised us soon, in a newly printed text, of which we have had a sample in the book of Isaiah, with the Massorah based upon the best extant manuscripts and editions collated in almost fifty years of diligent research.

In 1893, Paul Haupt, professor in Johns Hopkins University, with the co-operation of a number of scholars, began the publication of *The Sacred Books of the Old Testament: A Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text, Printed in Colors*. . . . This edition is not based upon an extended study of the Massorah, but is rather the result of the application of critical processes.

The latest noteworthy edition of the Hebrew Bible is that edited by Rudolph Kittel, professor in the University of Leipzig (1905-6), in co-operation with eight other Old Testament scholars. This edition is based substantially on the second Bomberg Bible, edited by Jacob ben Chayim (1524-25). Its purpose is to present not only a reliable Massoretic text, but also in footnotes the most

⁶ *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, London, 1897.

important variant readings of the Hebrew, of the chief versions, and also emendations of textual critics and commentators. This Kittel edition has added much useful material for students of the Hebrew Old Testament, even though it may have added little to our present knowledge of the Massorah.

In conclusion it may be said that the present equipment for the study of the Hebrew Old Testament is somewhat in advance of that of 1611. No new manuscripts of any consequence have been discovered in 300 years, but scholars have assiduously studied what we have, and have embodied their results in the latest texts already described. Our present hope is that Ginsburg, now in his eightieth year, may soon give us the most complete Masoretic Hebrew Bible ever published.